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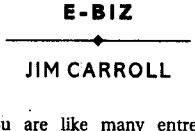
Quality check your Web site



E-BIZ

JIM CARROLL

If you are like many entrepreneurs, you've taken the plunge, established a World Wide Web site and are learning how to do business on the Internet.

But do you know whether your Web site is operating all of the time? There may be some real problems with your site that you don't know about. There may be various times of the day when your site simply becomes unavailable. You may have potential customers or clients trying to access a Web page that doesn't exist.

There are many situations where a site simply vanishes from the Web, often because of errors by the Internet service provider (ISPs) or another company that hosts a Web site. ISPs are continually changing and upgrading their computers, often with the result that some minor configuration problem leads to the disappearance of a few customer sites. A company can be completely unaware that its Web site has not been working for several days. In other cases, all too often a company updates various pages on its Web site, but makes a mistake, causing one or more pages to vanish.

It doesn't make any sense to establish a Web site, only to frustrate customers who are unable to reach the information you have made available. But there are some inexpensive tools that can help to ensure that your site is working correctly at all times.

I've signed up with Netmechanic Server Check Pro (**www.netmechanic.com**), a service that checks my Web site every few minutes. If the site has suddenly become unavailable, I'm notified by E-mail. If it continues for more than a few minutes, I can then contact my ISP and find out what's wrong. The service costs $10 (U.S.) a month, which is a small fee for significant peace of mind.

I also use a variety of programs that ensure all of the pages at my site are in good working order at all times. Siteman (**www.morning.asn.au/siteman**), a program available for $60, tests a copy of my Web site that is stored on my hard drive and advises me of any missing pages or images. The program includes other capabilities, making it worth the investment.

Finally, if you would like more sophisticated information about the quality of your site, you could use a program such as Sitesweeper (**www.sitetech.com**) or Linkbot (**www.tetranetsoftware.com**), both of which will test your Web site. After doing so, they will build a report detailing any missing pages or images, links to external Web sites that don't work and a variety of other information.

You can discover a wealth of link-checker programs for Windows and Macintosh systems. Check out Tucows for an extensive list (**tucows.iosphere.net/htmlval95.html** and **tucows.iosphere.net/mac/htmlvalmac.html**).

Establishing a Web site is one thing, but you must regularly verify its quality.

Jim Carroll is co-author of Small Business Online — A Strategic Guide for Canadian Entrepreneurs, *and can be reached by E-mail at jcarroll@jimcarroll.com*